

Three Poems by Karla Cordero

The first time I met the KKK

it was Halloween of 99'— I was cat woman
a ghetto Michelle Pfeiffer knock off—

Mexican girl, skinny framed
in soggy black spandex collecting

tootsie rolls & jaw breakers at every
knocked door—

down the street bushes
shape like small skyscrapers—

a herd of older kids parade dressed in white
robs & white cone shaped masks

they talk about women's
asses—cussing between sentences—

their eyes trace murder chalk
around my body

& I clutch the candy bag— both hands in
prayer—they see the stiffness holding

each leg hostage from catcall echoes & whistle.
I dare to walk past an army of ghost. Everything

in me regrets black pressed costume
outlining my pubescent figure—small breasts

panic as lungs quicken—

I turn, flip them a middle finger—

white bodies cloud into a huddle & throw
a lump of weight at my feet. They laugh—

bushes swallow their shadows—& I look down
to see Mr. Bill's dead cat. All fur & fresh blood.

La Llorona retires the hollering from her ears

The symphony—a small drum of breath
each freckle a dance she remembers—

sweeps across a face warm as milk
& in the kitchen she can hear an infant's smile

cleansed—
absolution is a devil tongue

she once ghosted with
her throat whispers confession to the wind

sweet as her children's cheekbones
& a black flower blooms honey rum pollen

strings grief into a pearl necklace
she plucks from bedrock—tears

draining the shame dry
her knees crawl out the river raw

La Llorona interviews for a job at Wal-Mart while coping with her guilt

So what makes you qualified for the job? In panic, a tsunami ruptures from her paling face. Salmon, salt, and child bones rain down her body. Llorona's mascara dresses the water in a black coat. The office is a swamp rising to the croak of bullfrogs. And across the room, job applications float a soggy sail. The department manager is no longer breathing. His body quicksands into darkness. Llorona swims—turns the doorknob to release the damn of murky water into aisles thirteen—down to fifteen. A choir of scream and gurgling throats echo up the ceiling. At the register Llorona apologizes. She grabs a dozen diapers and *pan dulce*. *No problema honey*, as the cashier lady smacks her gum. Salmon continues to slap across the deli. Carrying her groceries, Llorona leaves a trail of fish chum, as the black flood follows her home.

Karla Cordero is a Loft Literary Spoken Word Immersion Fellow and a contributing writer for *Poetry International*. Karla curates "Voice for Change" a reading series geared toward diversity and social justice at San Diego State University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in the following publications *Word Riot*, *The Acentos Review*, *Nailed Magazine*, *Toe Good Poetry* and elsewhere. Her first chapbook, *Grasshoppers Before Gods*, is to be published in the Fall of 2015 by Dancing Girl Press.

